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ABSTRACT

This document outlines general considerations and academic and non-academic guidelines to be observed by Milwaukee teachers and principals in making K-6 grade placement decisions in accordance with the School Board's new policy. The first section, "General Considerations for Grade Placement at All Grade Levels," considers: (1) evaluation as grade placement basis; (2) decision making; (3) academic and non-academic factors; (4) documentation throughout the school year; (5) pre-retention actions; (6) programs for low achievers; (7) summer school advancement; (8) placement beyond the next grade; and (9) specialty school exceptions. The second section provides guidelines for first grade placement of five-year-old kindergarten pupils, including how to identify "transitional" pupils (those who are not quite ready for ordinary first grade) and bilingual pupils who do not demonstrate readiness competencies in their dominant language. The third section provides academic guidelines for grade placement in grades 1 through 6. Bilingual programs for Spanish-dominant pupils are discussed separately. The final section discusses non-academic factors to be considered in grade placement: chronological age/years in school; physical, social, and emotional maturity and peer relationships; family relationships; learning rate and growth; attendance and mobility; and participation in outside academic programs. The School Board's statement outlining its new policy is appended. (RDN)

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milwaukee public schools
Division of Curriculum and Instruction
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THE GRADE PLACEMENT POLICY OF THE MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Kindergarten - Grade Six

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INTRODUCTION

Milwaukee School Board action of January 5, 1982, requires that a new grade placement policy be put into effect city wide as of the 1982-1983 school year. The newly developed policy includes major changes affecting all grades at the elementary level -- kindergarten through six. Among those changes are the following:

-- Kindergarten pupils are not expected to be retained. Exceptions are to be approved by the Kindergarten Supervising Teachers and School Administrative Specialists.

-- The primary grades will now be designated as first, second, and third.

-- Grade level expectation guides are to be used at all grade levels -- kindergarten through grade six.

-- Minimum requirements for reading achievement are stated for each grade level.

-- Retention may now occur under certain circumstances for pupils in first through sixth grade.

-- Informing of parents and documentation are strong elements of the policy.

The following pages include general considerations and academic and non-academic guidelines to be observed by teachers and principals in making grade placement decisions in accordance with the new policy.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR GRADE PLACEMENT AT ALL GRADE LEVELS

Grade placement decision making is to be based on the following general considerations as well as the academic criteria and non-academic factors outlined on subsequent pages.

Evaluation as Grade Placement Basis

Evaluation and grade placement decisions are based upon pupil achievement of minimum requirements and progress in acquiring grade level understandings, content, and skills. Elementary curriculum guides, including grade level expectation guides, specify goals and desired content and skills. They reflect the level of achievement desired for each grade level. The guides aid the teacher in goal setting and planning for content coverage in instruction.

Promotion is appropriate for pupils who show varying degrees of achievement and progress. Decisions must be made with regard to the placement of students who have failed to meet minimum requirements and would benefit from spending an additional year at the same grade level.

Decision Making

Teachers, with the concurrence of their principals, will arrive at grade-placement decisions on an individual pupil basis, evaluating academic achievement and progress, and weighing all the factors and guidelines to determine the most beneficial grade placement and learning environment. (See Attachment I - Number 3.)

Academic and Non-Academic Factors

Academic and non-academic factors which must be considered in making decisions for pupil grade placement include end-of-the-year reading level, academic progress in other areas, chronological age/years in school, maturity and peer relationships, family considerations, learning rate and growth, attendance and mobility, and participation in academic help programs outside of the regular school program.

Documentation Throughout School Year

Documentation to support grade-placement decisions is to be part of an on-going process during the school year. Pupil progress will be observed, monitored, and documented beginning in September. Pupil needs and grade-placement concerns will be noted and shared with parents on a regular basis through report cards, conference days, and necessary contacts. All parental contacts should be documented appropriately. (See Attachment I - Number 11.)

Pre-Retention Actions

By the third report card date, teachers and principals will be able to identify pupils who will probably not reach the required performance levels by June and will initiate the actions outlined in Pre-Retention Guidelines and Procedures, including further informing parents of specific pupil needs, criteria to be met for promotion, and suggestions for meeting pupil needs.

Program for Low Achievers

Programs and procedures have been or will be established, such as reading intervention, accelerated learning, and promotional summer school, to help low-achieving pupils so that deficiencies can be corrected and appropriate academic growth achieved.

Summer School Advancement

Pupils who are to spend an additional year at the same grade level can be advanced to the next grade level if they can make up the deficiencies by attending elementary summer school. (See Attachment I - Number 10.)

Placement Beyond the Next Grade

A decision could be made to place a pupil at a grade level beyond the next grade if grade level academic promotion requirements are met and non-academic considerations indicate the placement to be in the best interests of the pupil.

Specialty School Exceptions

Specialty school staffs choosing to develop grade placement policies consistent with their programs must submit the policy to the Superintendent for approval. (See Attachment I - Number 9.)

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GUIDELINES FOR FIRST GRADE PLACEMENT OF FIVE-YEAR-OLD KINDERGARTEN PUPILS

On January 5, 1982, the Board of School Directors passed the following:

> "5. Kindergarten pupils who are lacking readiness skills for first grade would be designated as first grade transitional pupils the following year. During that year, special effort would be made to help transitional pupils acquire needed skills. When more than five pupils designated as transitional are assigned to a classroom along with non-transitional students, the class size would be as low as 20 before class size is lower for other classes in the school. Depending on their progress, transitional pupils could enter second grade after the transition year or be assigned to a first grade class." (See Attachment I - Number 5.)

It is expected that after five-year-old kindergarten, pupils will be placed in first grade.

First grade placement would continue to include pupils who show adequate competencies in reading, language arts, and mathematics as well as essential physical/motor and social/emotional development. Progress will be systematically observed, monitored, and recorded in a variety of ways to assess achievement. (See Grade Level Expectations Guides for Reading, Mathematics, and Language Arts, Kindergarten - Grade Six and Evaluating Progress in Kindergarten, 1980.)

Pupils who do not demonstrate adequate readiness competencies will also be placed at the first grade level enabling them to profit from an experience in a class with a full-day program and a potential for a lower teacher/pupil ratio. These pupils will be first grade transitional pupils and will also be identified for the reading intervention program.

A transitional pupil is identified in kindergarten by one or more of the following characteristics or criteria:

- Has not mastered the kindergarten level of the adopted reading program.
- Has listening and speaking deficiencies.
- Had excessive absences during the year which resulted in a general lack of kindergarten skills.
- Has low average achievement, stanines 1, 2, or 3, verified by standardized test score. (Administered in May.)

Throughout the kindergarten year, this information is to be shared with parents to advise them of their child's achievement and needs.

Bilingual kindergarten pupils who do not demonstrate readiness competencies in their dominant language will be first grade transitional pupils. A bilingual transitional first grader may be identified by one or more of the following characteristics or criteria:

— Has not mastered the kindergarten level of the adopted reading program.

— Has listening and/or speaking deficiencies in dominant language.

— Had excessive absences during the year which resulted in a general lack of kindergarten skills.

Before the end of the kindergarten year, parents of pupils who do not demonstrate readiness competencies should be informed of the competencies which are lacking and should receive written notification of the rationale for their child's placement in first grade. A sample letter will be provided for this purpose. (See Attachment II.)

Exceptions to this policy must be approved by the Kindergarten Supervising Teacher and the School Administrative Specialist. (For example, a retention might be recommended by the principal, with the involvement of the school staff, supervisors, and parents, based upon a documented problem in social/emotional development.)

ACADEMIC GUIDELINES FOR GRADE PLACEMENT IN GRADES ONE THROUGH SIX

Grades 1-3

READING -- Reading achievement is the primary criterion used in making decisions for grade placement in Grades 1-3. (IMPORTANT NOTE: Reading level achievement is to be evidenced by actual reading performance, including comprehension, and is to be determined and documented as described in Guidelines for Reading Level Placement.)

Column two below indicates reading level expectations or goals for a grade level. Column three shows reading levels which are the minimum requirement for promotion to the next grade level. The book levels indicated refer to the degree of difficulty of specific Scott, Foresman levels or adopted Spanish series levels.

Principals and teachers may also consider promotion for a pupil who has almost reached the minimum required reading level after reviewing all considerations. The factors contributing to the decision to promote must be documented, and the decision explained to the parent.

Present Grade	End-of-Year Reading Level Expectation/Goal	End-of-Year Reading Level Minimum Requirement
1	Complete Book One level or above	Complete third Pre-Primer level (called "Primer" in Spanish)
2	Complete Book 2^2 level or above	Complete Book 2^1 level
3	Complete Book 3^2 level or above	Complete Book 3^1 level

Bilingual Program Spanish-Dominant Pupils

Spanish-dominant pupils will be expected to meet the same reading level expectations and minimum requirements in the adopted Spanish reading series as their English-dominant peers are expected to meet in English reading. (See table above.)

Santillana is the adopted basal series in Spanish. Books from Economy and Laidlaw Companies are used at specific levels to augment the Santillana Core Basal Program. A listing of reading levels and book titles for the three Spanish series has been provided to schools with a Bilingual Education Program.

Progress in reading in English as a Second Language relates to the promotion/retention evaluation of a pupil in the following ways:

-- If a child who began reading in Spanish as his/her first language is reading "at grade level" in English (i.e., has met the End-of-Year Reading Level Goal in English for the year's post-transition according to the Bilingual Program Reading Level Expectations and Minimum Requirements), he/she can be promoted regardless of reading level in Spanish.

-- If the child has met the minimum requirement in English reading for the year's post-transition and has almost reached the minimum requirement for Spanish reading as described in the table above, he/she can be promoted.

-- Lack of progress in reading in English as a Second Language may have a bearing on the promotion/retention evaluation only after a child has been reading in English for at least two years.

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Evaluation in other acdademic areas is to be based on two factors:

— How the pupil's present performance compares with his/her previous work.

— How the pupil's present performance compares with grade level expectations.

Movement to the next grade level is supported by achievement in other academic areas as follows:

MATHEMATICS — Has made adequate progress in the mathematics areas of Sets, Numbers, and Numeration Systems; Order, Comparisons, and Equivalences; Rational Numbers: Operations, Properties, and Computation; Geometry and Measurement as listed in the Grade Level Expectations for Mathematics, K-6. (These essential objectives were selected from the K-12 Mathematics Guide.) Adequate progress is evidenced by dated pupil work samples and assessments.

LANGUAGE ARTS — Has made adequate progress in the areas of Language/ Building Sentences, Word Power, Maintaining Usage and Manuscript Skills, Comprehending Literature, Oral Language and Listening Skills, Utilizing Study Skills, Composing, and Other Writing Experiences as listed in Grade Level Expectations for Language Arts, K-6. Adequate progress is evidenced by dated pupil work samples and assessments.

SCIENCE and SOCIAL STUDIES — Has acquired general knowledge and understanding according to the curriculum guidelines appropriate for each grade level.

If the pupil's reading level is below the minimum requirement, failure to make adequate progress in one or more of the other academic areas above, especially mathematics, would lend weight to consideration of an additional year at the same grade level.

First grade transitional pupils may be able to complete first grade in one year as a result of instruction, reading intervention provisions, and/or intellectual maturation. However, if the minimum reading progress is not achieved, an additional year in first grade must be considered.

The non-academic factors on pages 9 and 10 are to be weighed for each pupil before a final grade placement decision is made.

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ACADEMIC GUIDELINES FOR GRADE PLACEMENT IN GRADES ONE THROUGH SIX

Grades 4-6

In the intermediate grades, reading achievement is again a primary criterion for grade placement. Progress in other academic areas assumes more importance. For pupils in grades 4-6, a second year at grade level must be considered if pupil progress in both mathematics and language arts is inadequate, even if the minimum reading requirement has been met.

READING -- Reading level achievement is evidenced by actual reading performance, especially comprehension, and is to be determined and documented as described in Guidelines for Reading Level Placement.

Column two below indicates reading level expectations or goals for a grade level. Column three shows reading levels which are the minimum requirement for promotion to the next grade level. The book levels indicated refer to the degree of difficulty of specific Scott, Foresman levels or adopted Spanish series levels.

Present Grade	End-of-Year Reading Level Expectation/Goal	End-of-Year Reading Level Minimum Requirement
4	Completed Book 4 level or above	Completed 4[1] (Section 2) of Book 4 level
5	Completed Book 5 level or above	Completed 5[1] (Section 2) of Book 5 level
6	Completed Book 6 level or above	Completed 6[1] (Section 2) of Book 6 level

Bilingual Program Spanish-Dominant Pupils

Spanish-dominant pupils will be expected to meet the same reading level expectations and minimum requirements in the adopted Spanish reading series as their English-dominant peers are expected to meet in English reading. (See table above.)

Santillana is the adopted basal series in Spanish. Books from Economy and Laidlaw Companies are used at specific levels to augment the Santillana Core Basal Program. A listing of reading levels and book titles for the three Spanish series has been provided to schools with a Bilingual Education Program.

Progress in reading in English as a Second Language relates to the promotion/retention evaluation of a pupil in the following ways:

-- If a child who began reading in Spanish as his/her first language is reading "at grade level" in English (i.e., has met the End-of-Year Reading Level Goal in English for the year's post-transition according to the Bilingual Program Reading Level Expectations and Minimum Requirements), he/she can be promoted regardless of reading level in Spanish.

-- If the child has met the minimum requirement in English reading for the year's post-transition and has almost reached the minimum requirement for Spanish reading as described in the table above, he/she can be promoted.

-- Lack of progress in reading in English as a Second Language may have a bearing on the promotion/retention evaluation only after a child has been reading in English for at least two years.

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Principals and teachers may also consider promotion for a pupil who has almost reached the minimum required reading level after reviewing all considerations. The factors contributing to the decision to promote must be documented, and the decision explained to the parent.

Evaluation of pupil progress in other academic areas is to be based on two factors:

-- How the pupil's present performance compares with his/her earlier work.

-- How the pupil's present performance compares with grade level expectations.

Movement to the next grade level is supported by achievement in other academic areas as follows:

MATHEMATICS — Has made adequate progress in the mathematics areas of Sets, Numbers, and Numeration Systems; Order, Comparisons, and Equivalences; Rational Numbers: Operations, Properties, and Computation; Geometry and Measurement as listed in the Grade Level Expectations for Mathematics, K-6. (These essential objectives were selected from the K-12 Mathematics Guide.) Adequate progress is evidenced by dated pupil work samples and assessments.

LANGUAGE ARTS — Has made adequate progress in the areas of Language/ Building Sentences, Word Power, Maintaining Usage and Manuscript Skills, Comprehending Literature, Oral Language and Listening Skills, Utilizing Study Skills, Composing, and Other Writing Experiences as listed in Grade Level Expectations for Language Arts, K-6. Adequate progress is evidenced by dated pupil work samples and assessments.

SCIENCE — Has acquired general knowledge, vocabulary, and process skills appropriate to the grade level as evidenced by dated work samples and assessments of pupil performance. (See Science section of the Curriculum Guide for Intermediate Grades.)

SOCIAL STUDIES — Has acquired general knowledge and understanding of self, people, and cultures and skills appropriate to the grade level as evidenced by dated work samples and assessments of pupil performance. (See the Social Studies section of the Curriculum Guide for Intermediate Grades.)

If the pupil's reading level is below the minimum requirement, failure to make adequate progress in one or more of the above academic areas, especially mathematics, would lend weight to consideration of an additional year at the same grade level.

The non-academic factors on pages 9 and 10 of this document are to be weighed for each pupil before a final grade placement decision is made.

FACTORS OTHER THAN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT TO BE CONSIDERED IN GRADE PLACEMENT

Chronological Age/Years in School

It is recognized that chronological age and number of years spent in an elementary school are important factors in determining grade placement. The basic guideline is that the pupil should have completed sixth grade before becoming 14 years of age. Pupils entering first grade at the age of six would complete the sixth grade at the age of eleven or twelve if they were never retained.

Movement to the next higher grade level is recommended for pupils who will be at the indicated ages as of September of the next school year since an additional year at the grade level would result in an over-age problem at all subsequent grade levels.

Present Grade	Age September 1 of Next School Year Which Indicates Movement to Next Level
Kindergarten	6 years 7 months
1	8 years 3 months
2	9 years 3 months
3	10 years 3 months
4	11 years 3 months
5	12 years 3 months
6	13 years 3 months

The Board policy states: "Pupils should not be retained in elementary school more than twice." (See Attachment I - Number 6.)

A pupil should not be retained more than once at one grade level.

If a pupil does not meet the requirements for promotion but cannot be retained due to prior retention, for example, he/she will be administratively classified at the next grade level. This action will not be referred to or recorded as a promotion.

The factors below can influence achievement and should be weighed carefully, especially for pupils whose achievement is marginal. Strengths in these areas could support pupil success at the next higher grade level. Weaknesses may help to identify pupils who would benefit from an additional year at the grade level.

Physical, Social, Emotional Maturity and Peer Relationships

- Physical coordination
- Ability to cope effectively with stress, competition
- Relationships with peers
- Size relative to the pupil's age group
- Confidence in approaching new tasks

Family Relationships

-- Parent involvement and support
-- Pupil's relationships with siblings and/or twin

Learning Rate and Growth

-- The pupil's learning rate
-- Significant growth during the year

Attendance and Mobility

-- Pupil's family mobility patterns and pupil attendance

Participation in Outside Academic Programs

-- Summer school
-- Reading Clinic
-- Tutorial or other instructional programs

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ATTACHMENT I

TRANSITION FROM AN UNGRADED TO GRADED PRIMARY SCHOOL ORGANIZATION

(Final Action Taken by Milwaukee Board of School Directors on January 5, 1982)

1. The grade level designations for the primary school should be changed to first, second, and third.

2. Grade level expectations should be maintained at all grade levels.

3. Criteria for retention and promotion must be established at each grade level in line with the intervention guidelines. Retention decisions should be made upon recommendation of the teacher who has carefully considered pupil performance, age, and maturity and has involved parents. This retention decision must have the concurrence of the principal.

4. Re-grouping should be used in terms of reading, mathematics, and language arts, and other grade level expectations to insure placement at appropriate instructional levels.

5. Kindergarten pupils who are lacking readiness skills for first grade would be designated as first grade transitional pupils the following year. During that year, special efforts would be made to help transitional pupils acquire needed skills. When more than five pupils designated as transitional are assigned to a classroom, along with non-transitional students, the class size would be as low as 20 before class size is lower for other classes in the school. Depending on their progress, transitional pupils could enter second grade after the transition year or be assigned to a first grade class.

6. Pupils should not be retained in elementary school more than twice.

7. A program in accelerated learning should be implemented in schools where the pupils are below grade level. Pupils who have been retained can be advanced to grade level if they can make up deficiencies through a program of accelerated learning or by attending a promotional summer school.

8. Inservice in accelerated learning should be provided for teachers.

9. Specialty schools identified by the Superintendent should be exempt from any policy changes with the understanding that they have established policies consistent with their programs.

10. In addition to the present summer school program, a specific program for pupils should be developed with promotion being possible for certain pupils attending summer school.

11. Communication should be improved with parents by:

    a. making report cards more specific and relating them to expectations and standard.

    b. involving parents continuously.

    c. documenting parent involvement.

(over)

d. scheduling the first conference day on the second report card date for schools distributing report cards six times per year and expecting parents to pick up report cards at this time.

12. Inservice should be provided for staff regarding any policy changes.

13. Any policy changes should be communicated to parents.

14. Policy changes should be made effective in the 1982-1983 school year.